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# Classical reception in medieval preaching: Pyramus and Thisbe in three fifteenth-century sermons

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*Ovidio fabuloso, Ovidio pazzo*! While preaching in Florence in 1496, Savonarola complained bitterly about the use of Ovid in sermons, recalling that, in recent years, the audience had become accustomed to hear about «Ovid the imaginative, Ovid the fool» rather than the Scriptures from pulpits.[1] However, in the fictional dialogue constructed by the preacher, a listener rebutted that «Ovidian Metamorphoses was indeed good for preaching», giving Savonarola a pretext to reassert his radical exclusion of "pagan" authors and to emphasize the centrality of the Bible.[2] Similar complaints were not new among preachers.[3] Later on, authors who moved from quite different positions such as Erasmus and Luther harshly mocked the use of classical stories in preaching.[4] However, Ovidian myths were

[1] I first presented this work at the conference "Framing Classical Reception Studies" (Radboud University Nijmegen, 6–8 June 2013). I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers (Maarten De Pourcq, Nathalie de Haan and David Rijser) and to the participants, since their scholarship – directly or indirectly – provided me with valuable suggestions to further develop my research. Part of this chapter is an abbreviated and updated version of P. Delcorno, *'Christ and the soul are like Pyramus and Thisbe': An Ovidian Story in Fifteenth-Century Sermons*, in «Medieval Sermon Studies» 60 (2016), 37-61.

[2] Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ruth e Michea*, ed. V. Romano (Rome: Belardetti, 1961), vol. 2, 88. On the contemporary debates on the relationship between classical myths and Christian faith, see B. Guthmüller, *Concezioni del mito antico intorno al 1500*, in Id., *Mito, poesia, arte. Saggi sulla tradizione ovidiana nel Rinascimento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), 37-64. On the previous period, see Claudio Mésoniat, *Poetica theologia: La 'Lucula noctis' di Giovanni Dominici e le dispute letterarie tra '300 e '400* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984).

[3] See S. Wenzel, *Ovid from the Pulpit*, in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, eds. J. Clark, F. Coulson, K. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160-176: 173.

[4] See L. Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 148. The change of the intellectual climate was summarized by the 1559 Church ban on the *Ovidius moralizatus*; K.L. McKinley, *Reading the Ovidian Heroine. 'Metamorphoses' Commentaries 1100-1618* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 112-113.

relatively widespread in fifteenth-century sermons, which suggests that other preachers had an opposite opinion about the utility of these stories.

Introducing Ovidian myths in their sermons, preachers showed great freedom in appropriating and re-adapting them. This approach was determined by their specific goals. Their texts had to function as sermons before a liturgical congregation. What could appear to present-day scholars as a distortion of an Ovidian story (even a disfigurement, one might say) was part of a form of communication that mixed very different elements into one single discourse in order to involve, persuade, and move the audience. A sermon had in fact to follow its own criteria. A medieval sermon is «an oral discourse spoken in the voice of a preacher, who addresses an audience to instruct and exhort them on a topic concerned with faith and morals and based on a sacred text».[5] Every element within the sermon, even an Ovidian myth, eventually had to serve this overarching purpose.

Analysing three sermons that include the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in their communicative strategy will clearly evidence the fact that, from the perspective of simple transmission, the story of the two lovers and their tragic death appears increasingly distant from Ovid's version. One could say that the story became irredeemably "medieval". On the contrary, the perspective of classical reception studies supports an investigation of the chain of reception that shaped these versions of the Ovidian myth and their multiple functions in preaching, based on the assumption that «reception becomes decisive when traditions intersect, […] when classical material interacts with non-classical material».[6] From this perspective, medieval preaching can be seen as a peculiar framework for the reception of classics and as an influential medium for the dissemination of classical stories to a large audience. Moreover, sermons (with the potentialities and limits of this genre) provide scholars with a promising and largely unexplored area for classical reception studies.

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[5] B.M. Kienzle, *Introduction*, in *The Sermon,* ed. B.M. Kienzle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 143-174: 151. This volume is *the* reference point on medieval sermon studies. A recent useful introduction is A.T. Thayer, *The Medieval Sermon: Text, Performance, and Insight*, in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources*, ed. J.T. Rosenthal (London: Routledge, 2012), 43-58 and an updated bibliography is available in P. Delcorno, *Late Medieval Preaching* [2017], in *Oxford Bibliographies in Medieval Studies*, ed. P.E. Szarmach (New York: Oxford University Press) (DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195396584-0239).

[6] L. Hardwick and C. Stray, *Introduction: Making Connections*, in *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, eds. L. Hardwick and C. Stray (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 1-9: 9.

In the following pages, I first introduce preaching as medium of communication and the presence of classics in sermons. Next, I summarize the long-standing tradition of allegories on the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. Finally, I analyse how three fifteenth-century Franciscan preachers appropriated and transformed this Ovidian story in their sermons, pointing out the characteristics of this type of source and the presence of a wealth of texts virtually untapped by scholars working on the reception of classics.

**1. Preaching as communication medium**

As medieval sermon studies have increasingly pointed out in the last decades, preaching was one of the most pervasive media of religious instruction of the time.[7] In the late medieval period, the preachers' voices progressively reached larger strata of society, particularly in the urban context, where the effects of the project of religious acculturation promoted by the mendicant orders were more incisive. With a few exceptions, model sermon collections (the type of sources that this chapter analyses) were written in Latin and addressed a readership of clerics. The most successful collections enjoyed a European dissemination and were used by entire generations of preachers, who drew on them to craft their own sermons. While model sermons were written in Latin, preachers usually addressed their audience in the local vernacular, mediating and adapting the texts according to the circumstances. Model sermons, therefore, were the backbone of a pervasive communication system that reached thousands of people. Hence, the repeated use of model sermons enormously multiplied their impact on society. Moreover, in the late fifteenth century, they enjoyed an unprecedented diffusion through printing. For instance, the sermon collection for the Lenten period written by Conrad Grütsch (or Gritsch) - one of the preachers we will consider - knew a striking dissemination with 24 incunabula editions and at least 10 other early sixteenth-century editions. With no less than 15.000 copies in circulation, Grütsch's *Quadragesimale* was a real bestseller on the European book market.[8]

[7] See D. d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985) and A. Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10-39.

[8] See A.T. Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching and the Coming of the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

## 2. Classics in medieval preaching

A thorough discussion of the topic of «the classics in late-medieval preaching» – the title of a valuable article by Siegfried Wenzel[9] – would include a wide range of genres and ancient authors. To mention only a few of them, one finds quotations of authors such as Cicero and Seneca; episodes of Roman history; Aesopian fables and so forth.[10] Besides, since Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* argued for the use of Roman rhetoric in Christian oratory, preaching itself was framed by a dynamic reception and creative appropriation of classical rhetoric. This is visible in the studies of the *Artes praedicandi*, that is, the manuals on the art of preaching that became influential by the early thirteenth century.[11] These texts discussed also the possibilities and limits of using classical non-Christian authors in preaching. For instance, the seminal *Ars praedicandi* of Alain of Lille (d. 1202) approved the use of «dicta gentilium» in sermons on the basis of the example of the apostle Paul, who introduced quotations of philosophers to reinforce his arguments.[12] In a few cases, Alain of Lille even adopted a sentence from Virgil's *Aeneid* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as the basis for an entire sermon, explicitly approving the use of Gentile poets not only in schools, but also «in the assembly of the faithful».[13] Late-medieval preaching was indeed an omnivorous creature that was able to eat everything, to digest everything, and to use everything. In other words, a sermon was like a sponge that absorbed all elements that suited its goals from any other literary genre.[14] Everything could be used in the «wide rhetorical arsenal that was at the

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[9] S. Wenzel, *The Classics in Late-Medieval Preaching*, in *Medieval Antiquity*, eds. A. Welkenhuysen, H. Braet, W. Verbeke (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 127-143.

[10] On Aesopian fables in sermons, see M.A. Polo de Beaulieu, *Les fables au service de la pastorale des Ordres mendiants (XIIIe - XVe siècles)*, in *Les fables avant La Fontaine*, eds. J.-M. Boivin, J. Cerquiglini-Toulet, L. Harf-Lancner (Genève: Droz, 2011), 153-180.

[11] See M. Briscoe, *Artes praedicandi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 9-76 and S. Wenzel, *Medieval 'Artes praedicandi': A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon Structure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

[12] Alain of Lille, *Ars praedicandi*, Patrologia Latina 201, col. 114.

[13] «Sunt enim aliqui qui susurant de verbis poeticis in conventu fidelium nunquam debere fieri mencionem […] ; sed talibus invencionibus retroiectis ad ea que premisimus recuramus [i.e. the *Regia Solis*]»; Alain of Lille, *Sermo Regia Solis*, quoted by P. Dronke, *Metamorphoses: Allegory in Early Medieval Commentarties on Ovid and Apuleius*, in «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 72 (2009), 21-39: 29. This intriguing sermon presents an allegorical interpretation of Ovid's description of the palace of the Sun. See also F. Siri, *I classici e la sapienza antica nella predicazione di Alano di Lilla*, in *L'antichità classica nel pensiero medievale*, ed. A. Palazzo (Turhout: Brepols, 2011), 149-170.

[14] The simile of the sponge is used by M.A. Sánchez Sánchez, *Dos décades de studios sobre predicatión en la España medieval*, in «Erebea», 1 (2011), 3-20: 16.

disposal of late-medieval preachers».[15] They combined these different materials with a freedom that might appear chaotic or even tendentious to modern readers. Rather than considering this as a limit, the perspective advanced by classical reception studies acknowledges the agency of medieval readers and their appropriation of texts.[16] Going beyond the all-embracing concept of reception, scholars working within the project *Transformationen der Antike* proposed in 2011 precise criteria for a nuanced consideration of the multiple types of transformation of the classics – both as texts, concepts, and artefacts. They coined the term *allelopoiesis* to describe the reciprocal change («Reziproke Veränderung») that characterizes the actors and cultures involved in the process, which therefore produces structurally bidirectional results.[17] This seems a promising methodology in evaluating the presence, meaning, and function of classical texts in sermons, since it does not consider the medieval transformations of the classics as a negligible (when not an adulterated) by-product of the ancient sources, but as a mutually influential form of dialogue with them.

Instead of listing all the possible interactions between classics and preaching, through the analysis of the presence and function of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in sermons, this contribution aims to show the mixture of materials characterising sermons as well as the need for studying an area of the reception of antiquity that has not yet received enough scholarly attention. Some attention has been given to the *picturae* (ekphrastic devices, in which the descriptions of ancient gods were presented as allegorical personifications of virtues and vices) that were elaborated by the so-called fourteenth-century classicizing friars and widespread in late-medieval preaching.[18] More recently, the striking (allegorical) use of Virgil's

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[15] Wenzel, *The Classics in Late-Medieval Preaching*, 130.

[16] As introduction, see C. Martindale, *Reception*, in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, ed. C.W. Kallendorf (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 297-311.

[17] See *Transformation. Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels*, eds. H. Böhme et. al. (Paderborn: Fink, 2011), 39-56.

[18] See B. Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960). Smalley's seminal work and its limits are reconsidered in J.C. Clark, *The Friars and the Classics in Late Medieval England*, in *The Friars in Medieval Britain*, ed. N.J. Rogers (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), 142-151. On *picturae* in preaching, see K. Rivers, *Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice: Memory, Images, and Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), who underlines their success in fifteenth-century Germany, and N.F. Palmer, *'Antiquitus depingebatur'. The Roman Pictures of Death and Misfortune in the Ackermann aus Böhmen and Tkadlecek, and in the Writings of the English Classicizing Friars*, in «Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte», 57 (1983), 171-239. Moreover, on the peculiar case of Johannes

*Aeneid*, sometime in combination with Dante's *Commedia*, has been traced in some early fifteenth-century Lenten sermon collections structured as an imaginative journey in the afterlife.[19]

Apart from these specific topics, preaching is generally overlooked as a source for studying the reception of classical texts. This is true even for classical authors whose medieval reception has been the object of considerable scholarship, as is certainly the case with Ovid.[20] While studies of allegorical interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* are numerous, scholars mention the possibility that these allegories were used by preachers but do not refer to their actual presence in sermons. The flourishing studies on the *Ovide moralisé* and on Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus* are a case in point. These texts are often considered as preaching aids, yet the actual adoption of their allegories in sermons has not been closely investigated. [21] An important exception is the volume *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, which devotes a chapter to «Ovid from the pulpit».[22] However, it is possible to say that this field of research largely remains a *terra incognita*.

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Geiler von Kaysersberg (d. 1510), preacher of the cathedral of Strasbourg, who combined classical sources with medieval authors such as Boccaccio, see Ralf-Henning Steinmetz, *Die Rezeption antiker und humanistischer Literatur in den Predigten Geilers von Kaysersberg*, in *Humanismus in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, eds. N. McLelland, H.-J. Schiewer, S. Schmitt (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2008), 123-136 and Ralf-Henning Steinmetz, *Über Quellenverwendung und Sinnbildungsverfahren in den Narrenschiff-Predigten Geilers von Kaysersberg. Am Beispiel und mit dem lateinischen und dem deutschen Text der Predigt über die 'Bùlnarren'*, in *Predigt im Kontext,* eds. V. Mertens et al (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 89-124.

[19] See P. Delcorno, *Enea, la Sibilla e Dante: primi appunti su un quaresimale virgiliano*, «Cahiers d'études italiennes», 29 (2019), online journal (DOI : 10.4000/cei.5706) and P. Delcorno, *Un pellegrinaggio nell'inferno dantesco: Il Quadragesimale peregrini cum angelo*, in G. Strinna e G. Mascherpa, eds., *Predicatori, mercanti, pellegrini. L'Occidente medievale e lo sguardo letterario sull'Altro* (Mantua: Universitas Studiorum, 2018), pp. 219-250 (the *Quadragesimale peregrini* refers also to Ovid's *Methamorphoses*).

[20] See K.L. McKinley, *The Medieval Commentary Tradition 1100-1500 on Metamorphoses 10*, in «Viator», 27 (1996), 117-149; *Lectures et usages d'Ovide (XIII$^{e}$ – XV$^{e}$ siècles)*, ed. E. Baumgartner, «Cahiers de recherches médiévales», 9 (2002); *Lectures d'Ovide publiées à la mémoire de Jean-Pierre Néraudau*, ed. E. Bury (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2003); *Ovide métamorphosé: les lectures médiévaux d'Ovide*, eds. L. Harf-Lancner et al. (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2009); F. Clier-Colombani, *Images et imaginaire dans l'Ovide moralisé* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017). See also *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. P.E. Knox (Chichester - Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[21] See M. Possamaï-Perez, *L'Ovide moralisé: essai d'interpretation* (Paris: Champion, 2006), 789-868, who reads (like other scholars) the whole structure of the text as «un recueil de matériaux pour les prédicateurs» (835). Also McKinley, *Reading the Ovidian Heroine*, repeatedly labels these texts as «a type of handbook for preachers» but without specific references to sermons. See on this theme, Delcorno, *'Christ and the soul'*, 40-41.

[22] Wenzel, *Ovid from the Pulpit*, 160-176. Other examples of the use of Ovidian myths in preaching in Giordano da Pisa, *Quaresimale Fiorentino 1305-1306*, ed. C. Delcorno (Florence: Sansoni, 1974), 66-67 and X. Masson, *Une voix dominicaine dans la cité. Le comportement exemplaire du chrétien dans l'Italie du Trecento d'après le recueil*

I present here three fifteenth-century sermons that incorporated the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in order to highlight some possible directions for research and some methodological cautions on late-medieval preaching as a framework for the reception of classics. In these sermons, the two lovers and their tragic destiny were read mainly as an allegory of the perfect love between Christ and the soul. As Grütsch wrote: «Quid Piramus est nisi Dei filius? Tysbe vero anima devota». Each detail of the Ovidian *fabula* was deciphered as a Christian symbol, and the account of the intense love of Pyramus and Thisbe was thought to be able to inflame the audience to an equally passionate love for Christ. Or at least, this was the expectation of the preachers who introduced this story in a sermon that had to produce calculated effects.

### 3. Moral and allegorical readings of Pyramus and Thisbe

The moral and allegorical interpretations of Pyramus and Thisbe date back to the twelfth century and, for the sake of simplicity, can be divided into two main branches: *Ovidius ethicus* and *Ovidius theologicus*.[23]

The moral reading of the tale condemns the passion that leads the young couple to death. Developing this interpretation, many commentators played with the change of colour of the mulberries. As John of Garland (d. *c.* 1272) wrote, their change from white to black «indicates that death is hidden in the sweetness of love».[24] This interpretation was recurrent

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*de sermons de Nicoluccio di Ascoli* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 171-182. For a *status quaestionis* on Ovidian myths in sermons, see Delcorno, *'Christ and the soul'*.

[23] See F. Schmitt Von Mühlenfels, *Pyramus und Thisbe. Rezeptionstypen eines Ovidischen Stoffes in Literatur, Kunst und Musik* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1972), 26-65. On medieval reworkings of this myth, see also C. Ferlampin-Acher, *Piramus et Tisbé au Moyen Âge: le vert paradis des amours enfantines et la mort des amants*, in *Lectures d'Ovide*, 115-147; J.-Y. Tilliette, *Le «Cantique des Cantiques» relu par l'«Ovide moralisé»: interprétations allégoriques du conte de Pyrame et Thisbé*, in *Il Cantico dei Cantici nel Medioevo*, ed. R.E. Guglielmetti (Florence: Galluzzo, 2008), 553-564; M. Gaggero, *Pyrame et Thisbé. Métamorphoses d'un récit ovidien du XIIe au XVe siècle*, in *Les romans grecs et latins et leurs réécritures modernes*, ed. B. Pouderon (Paris: Beauchesne, 2015), 77-125; D. Klein, *Tragische Minne? Die Geschichte von Pyramus und Thisbe und ihre mittelalterlichen Bearbeitungen*, in *Tragik und Minne*, ed. R. Töpfer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2017), 85-108 (this article was published when this contribution was already submitted). Moreover, in the early sixteenth-century Netherlands, plays on Pyramus and Thisbe could include an allegorical reading of the story; see P. Happé, *Pyramus and Thisbe: Rhetoricians and Shakespeare*, in *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries, 1400–1625*, eds. E. Strietman and P. Happé (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 149–168.

[24] «Alba prius morus nigredine mora colorans / signat quod dulci mors in amore latet»; quoted in F. Schmitt Von Mühlenfels, *Pyramus und Thisbe*, 28. See also M. Moussy, *La moralisation du mythe: Pyrame et Thisbé dans la Bible de Jean Malkaraume*, in *Ovide métamorphosé*, 83-107.

in commentaries on Ovid and lasted well into the sixteenth-century. One would imagine that this reading of the myth was perfect for a sermon against deathly lustful passion. Still, as far as I know, there is no trace of this interpretation in preaching.[25] This reminds us that the passage from clerical readings of classical myths to their actual presence in sermons should not be taken for granted and needs to be carefully investigated.

The allegorical reading exalted the story of the two lovers in a Christological perspective, in which Pyramus voluntarily offers himself to death as Christ did for human salvation. This interpretation dates back to early fourteenth-century texts. It recurs in a few manuscripts of the *Gesta romanorum*, and yet became influential in the version provided by the *Ovide moralisé* and then introduced in the *Ovidius moralizatus* of Bersuire.[26] In this allegorical interpretation, each detail of the Ovidian tale was deciphered as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the soul, as we will see in the sermons.

**4. The Passion Sunday sermon of Conrad Grütsch**

The first text that I consider is part of the Lenten sermons of Conrad Grütsch (d. 1475c.), a Franciscan friar of the Upper Germany province.[27] This sermon collection was written around 1440 and, among fifteenth-century sermons, is characterized by a remarkable presence of classical stories.[28] They were attentively registered in the index, as items that should be easy to find for preachers who used this sort of encyclopaedia for preaching. The

[25] Beside the sermons presented in this article, the only other mention of Pyramus and Thisbe that I know is an early fifteenth-century preacher who complains that some of the clergymen were not well versed in the Bible and the Church fathers but instead knew very well this and other myths; *Three Middle English Sermons from the Worcester Chapter MS F.10*, ed. D.M. Grisdale (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1939), 75.

[26] See a detailed analysis of these texts in P. Delcorno, *La parabola di Piramo e Tisbe. L'allegoria della fabula ovidiana in una predica di Johann Meder (1494)*, in «Schede Umanistiche», 23 (2009), 67-106: 78-84.

[27] On this friar, see B. Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction before the Council of Trent* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 109-110. The printed editions wrongly ascribed this collection to Conrad's younger brother, Johann Grütsch. I use the *editio princeps*: Johann [i.e. Conrad] Gritsch, *Quadragesimale* [Nuremberg, n.a. 1474] (GW 11538).

[28] See N.F. Palmer, *Bacchus und Venus*, in *Literatur und Wandmalerei II: Konventionalität und Konversation*, eds. E.C. Lutz, J. Thali, R. Wetzel (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2005), 189-235 and P. Delcorno, *In the Mirror of the Prodigal Son: The Pastoral Uses of a Biblical Narrative (c. 1200-1550)* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 164-170.

entry *fabula* lists twenty-four fables and myths (fig. 1), from the Aesopian story of the cicada and the ant to the Ovidian myth of Atalanta.[29]

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is listed among these *fabulae*. Grütsch introduced it in a sermon for an important liturgical celebration, namely Passion Sunday. In its last part, the sermon deals with the cardinal virtues and, rather unpredictably, the section on prudence ends with the story of the two lovers. How is it possible to connect the story of a tragic suicide with prudence? Grütsch used a snake and a stone. The Gospel reads «Estote prudentes sicut serpentes» (Matthew 10,16). Drawing on the medieval bestiaries and encyclopaedias, Grütsch singled out and allegorized the characteristics of the snake's prudence. For instance, he stated that «the snake blocks its ears before the snake charmer; in fact, it puts one ear on the stone and blocks the other with its own tail».[30] This image may seem odd for modern readers but was common in medieval descriptions of the snake.[31] Grütsch's interpretation is ingenious, since it states that to combat worldly seductions one has to close his or her ears like the snake. This can be done by thinking of Christ, who is the true stone, and of death, which is the tail, the end of life.[32] The last characteristic of the prudent snake is that it renews itself when it sheds its skin by passing through holes in a stone. In the allegorical reading, «the stone is Christ and its holes are his wounds».[33] Therefore, believers should reject their sinful lives (like the snake its old skin) by passing through these holes, i.e. through the meditation on the Passion.[34]

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[29] The story of Atalanta recurs also in other sermons and has two possible readings, in which Hippomenes is either the devil or Christ, while Atalanta is invariably the human soul; see Wenzel, *The Classics in Late-Medieval Preaching*, 130. On other Ovidian myths used by Grütsch, see Delcorno, *'Christ and the soul*', 44.

[30] «Seconda prudentia quod obturat aures suas ne audiat incantatorem. Nam unam aurem applicat ad petram et aliam cum cauda obturat»; Gritsch, *Quadragesimale*, 32P.

[31] Augustine and Isidore already used the image of the snake that closes its ears with its tail as a symbol of those who do not listen to the Scripture; see N. Maldina, *La serpe in corpo. Per il bestiario di Giordano da Pisa*, in «Erebea», 1 (2011), 137-156: 145.

[32] «Sic nos facere debemus contra corruptores hominem allicientes […] ad vicia mundi […]. Quando ergo tales incantant superiorem partem racionis unam aurem Christo, qui est petra, coniungiamus, 1 Cor 10. Et inferiorem obturemus cogitatione finis et mortis nostre, que est cauda corporis et vite nostre, ne illi qui blande nobis voluptates suggerunt protrahant ad consensum»; Gritsch, *Quadragesimale*, 32P. On this less diffuse tradition of a positive reading of the snake blocking its ears, see *The Latin and German "Etymachia": Textual History, Edition, Commentary*, ed. N. Harris (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1994), 302-306.

[33] «Petra est Christus cuius foramina sunt ipsius plurima vulnera»; Gritsch, *Quadragesimale*, 32P.

[34] «Cum ergo veterem pellem, id est nostram conversationem corruptam et abominabilem, deponere volemus, devota contemplatione et recordatione passionis Christi per illa foramina transeamus» Gritsch, *Quadragesimale*, 32P.

At this point, the Franciscan preacher introduced the two Ovidian lovers in order to depict the ideal relationship between Christ and the soul: «Est enim de Christo et de anima compassionata sicut de Piramo et Tysbe, de quibus narrat Ovidius». Grütsch referred to Ovid here. Yet, he copied both the narrative and its interpretation form the *Ovidius moralizatus* almost word-by-word.[35] Therefore, Grütsch's reception of Ovid was indeed the appropriation of the previous reception by Bersuire, who in turn relied on the *Ovide moralisé*.

In this interpretation, Pyramus is Christ and Thisbe the soul. They are similar because the human being «ad imaginem Dei factus est». The wall that separates the two lovers indicates the original sin, while the fissure through which they talk is the voice of the prophets. They arrange a tryst under at fountain, which symbolizes the baptism, while the lioness that disrupts their meeting is the devil (Appendix 1). The same reasoning is used until the death of Pyramus under the mulberry tree, which symbolizes the Cross that Christ «covered in his own blood» («proprio sanguine cruentavit»). The suicide of Thisbe represents the voluntary death of the soul, who renounces to the world and its temptations. From the point of view of Grütsch, this spiritual union with Christ's Passion represented the supreme form of prudence, since it saved the soul from worldly dangers. In this way, each detail of the Ovidian tale finds its Christian meaning, with the same mechanism used for the snake. From the rather utilitarian perspective of late-medieval preaching, the "naturalistic" description of a snake and the classical story of Pyramus did not radically differ. Preachers looking at Grütsch's collection when preparing their sermons had both at their disposal to introduce their listeners to a meditation on the Passion and on prudence.

Grütsch limited his work to selecting, excerpting, and copying a page of Bersuire, without making significant additions. Still, the presence of this allegory in a sermon should not be underestimated for several reasons. First, this is not just a passing reference to a classical myth without further development, as in many other sermons.[36] Grütsch presented the story at length and in full detail. He did so not only as a cultured reference to reinforce the preacher's profile, but as an element of the sermon that was meant to affect the emotions of the audience. Second, the recurrence of the *Ovidius moralizatus* in preaching is often assumed in the academic literature, yet without an effective validation. In this passage of Grütsch it is

[35] The texts of Bersuire and Grütsch and their translations are available in Delcorno, *'Christ and the* soul', 46.

[36] See Wenzel, *The Classical in Late-Medieval Preaching*, 129.

possible to see how Bersuire's reading was actually adapted to a sermon. Third, the interpretation of Bersuire is encapsulated in a text that shed new light on it. The idea of presenting Pyramus and Thisbe as an example of prudence was highly innovative and even audacious, particularly considering the opposite reading that portrayed them as an example of the ruinous consequences of lust. Finally, as I said, the value of this sermon collection also lies in its impressive dissemination. This was one of the most successful sermon collections in Germany and France, with more than 35 printed editions between 1474 and 1520. Generations of preachers used it to prepare their sermons and were suggested to present this allegory to their congregations. Mediated and controlled by the clergy, this version of the Ovidian myth was not restricted to the literate elite. It represented instead one of the possible entry points to classical heritage for people who did not have direct access to Latin texts, but were among the listeners of sermons. Indeed, Grütsch's *Quadragesimale* spread this interpretation of the Ovidian myth well before the *Ovidius moralizatus* was available as a printed book (1509) and even before the publication of the *Bible de poetes* (1484), which made accessible Bersuire's allegories in the French vernacular.[37]

However, did preachers really mention Pyramus and Thisbe when they preached to their congregations? In other words, in the *mare magnum* of Grütsch's sermon collection, was this part actually used by preachers? The relationship between written model sermons and their actual performance remains elusive, since it is difficult to trace out what was really said to a concrete audience.[38] Nevertheless, there are evidences of the interest of other preachers in Grütsch's section on Pyramus and Thisbe. I mention three of them.

First, on the page of a 1486 copy of the *Quadragesimale*, one of its users wrote «Fabula de Priamo et Cyspe», following the mistake of this printed edition, which constantly misspelt the names of the two Ovidian lovers.[39] Within the twelve pages of the sermon, this is the only item of marginalia. For this reader, this was the most interesting point of the sermon, something that he wanted to be able to find quickly when browsing the book. The fact that he

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[37] See J. Engels, *L'edition critique de l'"Ovidius moralizatus" de Bersuire*, «Vivarium», 9 (1971), 19-24 and J-Cl. Moisan and S. Vervacke, *Les Methamorphoses d'Ovide et le monde de l'imprimé: la Bible des Poëtes, Bruges, Colard Mansion, 1484*, in *Lectures d'Ovide*, 217-237.

[38] See *Dal pulpito alla navata. La predicazione medievale nella sua recezione da parte degli ascoltatori (secc. XIII-XV)*, in «Medioevo e Rinascimento», n.s. 3 (1989).

[39] Johann [Conrad!] Gritsch, *Quadragesimale*, [Strasbourg: Printer of the 1483 'Vitas Patrum'], 1486, 32Q, held by the Universitäts und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt, Inc. III 190.

did not correct the misspelt names shows that either he was not so familiar with the Ovidian myth or he did not care too much for it. While this is only a small detail that hints at the interest of other preachers for this section of the sermon, more significant is the fact that, from 1484 onwards, some printed editions of Grütsch's sermons presented a reworked and expanded reading of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe.[40] In this sophisticated rewrite of the allegory, someone added biblical quotations, stressed the sinful condition of the human nature, and emphasized the voluntary sacrifice of Christ. Whoever introduced these changes must have been a clergyman who considered the allegory of Pyramus and Thisbe as a particularly valuable part of the sermon and who wanted to further enrich it, probably with the purpose of using it in preaching. His anonymous voice joined the dialogic reception of the Ovidian myth and represented another layer in a complex stratification. Finally, also another preacher, Johann Meder, imitated Grütsch by reworking in a highly creative way this Ovidian myth for the same liturgical occasion. This case deserves a specific attention.

**5. Johann Meder's *parabola* and a twelfth-century capital**

The 1495 edition of the *Quadragesimale novum* of the Observant Franciscan Johann Meder (d. 1518) states that it was first preached in Basel in 1494. This allows us to know exactly the original audience and cultural setting of these sermons.[41] This peculiar cycle is entirely based on a lively retelling of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15,11-32). In sermon after sermon, Meder presented the itinerary of the prodigal son in a semi-dramatic form, with dialogues between the characters of the story. Hence, the entire sermon collection is an example of creative reception and bold transformation of a biblical parable. Within this fictional framework, Meder ended each sermon with a *parabola*, which indeed is an allegorical vision. In order to explain something to the prodigal son, his guardian angel (a key character introduced here by Meder) asks him to look at a vision. The prodigal son describes what he has seen but cannot understand and the angel interprets the symbolic meaning of the vision.

[40] The two versions are attested already by the manuscript tradition. The expanded version is present in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 3540, fol. 221rv (1468) and Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Pal. lat. 384, fol. 243r (1466). The first edition presenting this reworked passage is Johann [Conrad] Gritsch, *Quadragesimale*, [Strasbourg: Printer of the 1483 'Vitas Patrum'], 1484 (GW 11549). The comparison between the two versions and the list of the different printed editions is provided in Delcorno, *'Christ and the soul'*, 48-50 (where the manuscript tradition was still not considered, leading to some inaccuracies).

[41] See Delcorno, *In the Mirror of the Prodigal Son*, 310-369.

In the sermon of the Passion Sunday, the *parabola* is based on the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. The allegorical interpretation largely derives from the *Ovidious moralizatus* and it is highly plausible that Meder took the idea from Grütsch's *Quadragesimale*. As we have seen, Grütsch had presented this myth on the same liturgical day and his sermon collection was enormously popular in the south of Germany, where Meder spent all his life as a friar. However, Meder wrote an entirely new text by introducing significant differences in the presentation of the Ovidian story, its interpretation, and its function within his sermon collection.[42] This sermon represents the decisive turning point of Meder's collection. In the first part of Lent, the prodigal son engages in a dialogue with his guardian angel (fig. 2), who guides him in a penitential journey to go back home. There, the father welcomes his son (fig. 3), provides him with new clothes, and, unexpectedly, hands him over to Christ, who replaces the guardian angel as his master (fig. 4).[43] Therefore, Christ enters as a character within the narrative framework of Meder's *Quadragesimale*. At the end of his first dialogue with the prodigal son, Christ introduces him to the vision of the day – the *parabola* – that indeed results to be a peculiar version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. As Christ says to the prodigal son, he presents this story and interprets it so «that you love me with all your heart and participate in my Passion» (Appendix 2).

Meder intervened not only in the allegorical explanation but also in different points of the story-line. For instance, while the medieval tradition stressed the original *paritas* between the two lovers, Meder stated that one was the son of a king and the other a beautiful poor girl who was prisoner of a nasty prince. Hence, the story is already oriented towards its allegorical interpretation, in which the girl is the human soul prisoner of the devil. The most striking novelty is the description of the death of Pyramus. The connection between the mulberry tree and the Cross was normally reserved for the allegorical explanation (as in Grütsch), while here Meder changed the story itself to shift it closer to the Passion of Christ. Meder's version reads:

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[42] Meder omitted the names Pyramus and Thisbe and any historical reference to Babylon, since this should not be an historical account (like in Ovid) but a parable. More details on this sermon in Delcorno, *La parabola di Piramo*, 67-106, in which I did not identify Grütsch as Meder's closest antecedent. In his sermons, Meder introduced only this Ovidian myth.

[43] The images of this very peculiar Lenten sermon collection were produced by one of the artists who had worked with Albrecht Dürer on the illustrations of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenshiff*; see on this Delcorno, *In the Mirror of the Prodigal Son*, 354-363 and, for more details, P. Delcorno, *Un sermonario illustrato nella Basilea del Narrenschiff. Il Quadragesimale novum de filio prodigo (1495) di Johann Meder*, in «Franciscan Studies», 68 (2010), 215-257 and 69 (2011), 403-475: 448-468.

«for the excess of love and compassion, hanging himself on a tree, he pierced his heart with his own sword». This death on a tree («se per nimio amore et compassione in arbore suspendens») does not have parallels in the medieval tradition of the Ovidian myth.[44] There is only one exception, namely a twelfth-century capital of the cathedral of Basel that depicts this myth (fig. 5-8) and shows Pyramus, who pierces himself hanging on a tree (fig. 7).[45] This sculpture represents the oldest Christological interpretation of this myth, predating all the texts that are known.

Meder was undoubtedly familiar with this image, which was located (and still is) in a perfectly visible part of Basel cathedral. By saying that Pyramus died «se in arbore suspendens», Meder probably evoked what he and his listeners could see in the cathedral of their city. He was not only making use of a universally famous love story, but also silently referring to the image of this capital, which was familiar to his audience – or at least part of it. The capital provided Meder with a previous visual reception and allegorical interpretation of the Ovidian myth. While this sculpture probably influenced Meder's reception of the Ovidian story, he skillfully connected his sermon with an image of the cathedral. This would have been constantly accessible and visible for his listeners, thus, transforming the capital into a support for their memory, as an *imago agens*. After Meder's sermon, the people seeing this capital might have been prompted to think of the words of the preacher, prolonging their effect.[46]

Concerning the allegorical interpretation, Meder followed broadly Grütsch. The main innovation was the authority of this interpretation. In Meder's fictional construction, Christ interprets this story and identifies with Pyramus by saying to the prodigal son: «I am the son of the king […] I loved the human soul […] I offered myself voluntarily on the Cross». In this way, the allegory of the Ovidian *fabula* receives the highest possible validation and is elevated to the level of the evangelical parables.

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[44] See Delcorno, *La parabola di Piramo*, 87-88. The text echoes a famous passage of the New Testament: «et occiderunt [Iesum] suspendentes in ligno» (Acts 10,39).

[45] On medieval images of Pyramus and Thisbe and on this capital, see Delcorno, *La parabola di Piramo*, 84-93.

[46] See L. Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini: predicazione in volgare dalle origini a Bernardino da Siena* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), XXV.

Finally, while in the sermon of Grütsch the story of Pyramus and Thisbe was an optional element, this time it played a strategic role in the sermon and the entire collection.[47] In fact, it redefines the identity of the two main characters – Christ and the prodigal son – who occupy the fictional stage during the whole second part of the *Quadragesimale*. While in the previous sermons the listeners are invited to identify with the prodigal son, from this sermon onwards, they are progressively asked to regard Mary Magdalene and the bride of the Song of Songs as their models.[48] Without expanding further on this aspect, one has to note that the construction of the identity of the *sponsa Christi* begins when Christ exhorts the prodigal son − and so each listener − to become like Thisbe. From Meder's point of view, this *parabola* should actively involve the response of the listeners and affect their life; it asked for a transformative reception.

**6. The Good Friday sermon of Jacobus de Lenda**

The last preacher considered here is Jacobus de Lenda, a Franciscan friar, *magister* in theology (probably) in Paris, where his Lenten sermons were published in 1500.[49] In this collection, the Ovidian story is again found in a strategic position, namely at the beginning of the Good Friday sermon.[50] This was the most important sermon of the year. Prominent preachers were asked to lead their congregations in a poignant commemoration of the Passion of Christ with sermons that lasted up to five hours.[51] Jacobus de Lenda placed Pyramus and Thisbe at the threshold of such a demanding oral performance, as a moving story to introduce his audience to the contemplation of the Passion.

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[47] It is valid here what has been noted for another sermon: «The preacher appropriates a classical story […] because its totality connects with what has been said and at the same time moves the development of his discourse forward»; Wenzel, *Ovid from the Pulpit*, 173.

[48] See Delcorno, *La parabola di Piramo*, 93-101 and Delcorno, *In the Mirror of the Prodigal Son*, 333-350.

[49] Jacobus de Lenda, *Sermones quadragesimales* (Paris: Félix Baligault, 1499/1500) (GW M17770). Nothing is known about this preacher apart from what is written on the front pages of his sermon collections, which present him as *magister* in theology and canon law and as *vivacissimus predicator*. His convent of provenience might have been that of Lens, near Arras; see B. De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia Franciscana Neerlandica ante saeculum XVI: Pars biographica* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1974), 168-169.

[50] Like Meder, Jacobus omitted the names of Pyramus and Thisbe. In his sermons, Jacobus included a few stories of the *Metamorphoses*, such as Phaeton as an example of wrath (fols. 45v-46r) and a curious version of the myth of Proserpina, which he introduced by saying: «Ovidius dicit in primo metamorphoseos» (fol. 72v).

[51] See an overview, with the consolidated bibliography, in H. Johnson, *The Grammar of Good Friday. Macaronic Sermons of Late Medieval England* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

The sermon begins with a theological discussion of the causes of the Passion to draw attention to its necessity and the free will of Christ.[52] The fourth and last cause would have been the *causa formalis*, yet, instead of analysing it, Jacobus closes the introduction (*prothema*) by presenting the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, which serves as an overture to the body of the sermon. As the preacher states, the remainder of the sermon deals with the formal cause, since it offers the listeners a step-by-step description of the Passion. In this way, the allegorical presentation of the Ovidian myth serves as a transition from the preliminary theological discussion to the meditation on the events of the Passion. It is conceived to emotionally involve the audience.

Jacobus de Lenda identified his source in Ovid («legitur in tertio libro methamorphoseos»), yet he radically reshaped the story to match his own goals (Appendix 3). He started by saying: «Once upon a time there was a king who had a son and this king lived in a great castle. Close to the castle there was the house of a poor man, who had a very beautiful daughter. The son of the king often gazed at her from his window and she looked very nice to him…». Some element recalls the version provided by Meder (the absence of proper names as well as the *disparitas* between the two protagonists), yet this time the preacher developed a Marian interpretation. In the story, the prince makes his marriage proposal to this sort of Cinderella and their dialogue is technically a parody of the Annunciation to the Virgin, as the last line spoken by the girl makes clear. She says «Domine mi, ancilla vestra sum […]», echoing the «Ecce ancilla domini» of the Gospel – a reference that everyone in the audience would understand. Hence, the Ovidian story completely yields to the purposes of the preacher. He probably developed here an element of Bersuire's allegory, which had proposed – as secondary reading − to identify Thisbe with the Virgin Mary on the basis of the Gospel prophecy: «tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius» (Luke 2,35).[53] While the connection with the Annunciation was an absolute novelty, the remainder of Jacobus' version of the story matches more closely the usual description of the tragic destiny of the two lovers: the appointment at the fountain, the arrival of the lion, the escape of the girl and so forth, until their dramatic death by means of the same sword. Noteworthy is the absence

[52] Jacobus de Lenda, *Sermones quadragesimales*, fols. 63v-64v.

[53] «Vel dic quod ista puella est beata Virgo, ad quam Dei filius per incarnationem venit et sub crucis arbore mori voluit, qua in passione per conpassionem eius gladio se transfodit. Luc 2: *tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius*»; Pierre Bersuire, *Ovidius moralizatus*, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS D 66 inf, fol. 40r.

of any mention of the mulberry tree, which usually symbolized the Cross, while the detail of Thisbe who goes to the fountain with her jar (*potum*) probably is a reference to the widespread legend of the Virgin Mary's encounter with the angel at the fountain, where she had gone with a pitcher to fill it with water (cf. *Protoevangelium of James* 11,1-3).[54]

The details of the story were perfectly disposed towards an accurate allegorical reading: the king as God the Father, the castle as heaven, the poor house as the world and so on. However, this time an articulated allegorical explanation is missing, since Jacobus de Lenda only specifies its general meaning: «This symbolizes the mystery of the Passion of Jesus Christ, in which two died, Christ and the Virgin Mary». Identifying Thisbe with Mary, the preacher preferred instead to stir up the audience's compassion for the Virgin by echoing the Gospel of Luke («O qualis dolor! O qualis tristitia, *ipsius animam pertransivit gladius*») and to exhort his listeners to look at the Cross and pray with the solemn words of the hymn of Good Friday: *O crux, ave, spes unica*.

The process of hybridization between the classical myth and the biblical story is complete. The freedom of expression of the preacher (as in the previous cases) was ruled by his concrete aims. His text had to serve as sermon, within a liturgical celebration, in the emotionally intense context of Good Friday. What could appear to present-day readers as a distortion of the Ovidian myth was part of a form of communication that was able and eager to mix in one single narrative those stories that could vividly involve the audience: the Passion of Christ, the sorrows of the Virgin, and the tragic destiny of the two Ovidian lovers.

**Conclusion**

The sermons here considered demonstrate how preachers interacted with and contributed to a multifaceted tradition of allegorical readings of the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. These sermons were part of a complex chain of reception that involved written texts, oral performances, and images. The analysis of these sermons argues that a proper evaluation of classical myths in preaching should not be limited to highlighting their presence, as this would isolate them from their contexts. Each occurrence must be studied by considering the structure of the sermon, its liturgical setting, and its intended audience. In this way, it becomes

[54] While in the *Protoevangelium of James* the angelic salutation at the fountain precedes the annunciation, here the encounter at the fountain follows the dialogue.

possible to appreciate how a classical story was used by looking at its transformation, its recombination with other materials, and its function with a sophisticated communicative strategy. Finally, the wide dissemination of the sermon collections here considered reminds us that in the same age of the humanistic (re)discovery of the classics, preaching was a highly influential medium for the dissemination of classical stories to a large audience. The voice of the preachers could provide an entry point to antiquity for illiterate people, who did not have a direct access to Latin texts. Notwithstanding the complaints of preachers such as Savonarola or humanists such as Erasmus, who argued for a rigid separation between the Bible and the classics and for the exclusion of ancient myths from the pulpits, the sermons here analysed prove the presence of a concomitant and concurrent attitude towards allegories of classical stories, which were considered powerful instruments to instruct, entertain, and move the audience.

**Further readings**

For a rich overview on medieval preaching, see Kienzle (2000) and Thayer (2012). Two contributions of Wenzel (1995, 2010) and Delcorno (2016) highlight different strategies of appropriation of Ovidian myths in preaching and provide a framework that goes beyond the cases presented here. Earlier occurrences of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in preaching are in Alain of Lille (Dronke 2009; Siri 2011) and in a 1306 sermon by Giordano da Pisa (1974), 66-67. For a general overview on the use of classical *picturae* in preaching, see Rivers (2010), Palmer (2005) and the chapter «Le Panthéon antique de Nicoluccio di Ascoli» in Masson (2009), 171-182. On fifteenth-century debates about the relationship between classical myths and Christian faith see Guthmüller (1997). Further examples of medieval allegorical readings of Pyramus and Thisbe are in Schmitt von Mühlenfels (1972), Tilliette (2008), Moussy (2009), Gaggero (2015), and, for sixteenth-century dramas, Happé (2006). On the allegorical interpretations of *Aeneid* VI in fifteenth-century sermons, as example of the use of another classical author in preaching, see Delcorno (2018) and Delcorno (2019).

**Key words**

Medieval allegories; classical myths; Ovid; chain of reception; preaching; liturgical context; dissemination

## Appendix

### 1. Conrad Grütsch

Quid Piramus est nisi Dei filius? Tyspe [sic!] vero anima devota, qui se a principio mirabiliter dilexerunt, per caritatem et amorem coniungi invicem decreverunt. Dato tamen quod ad ymaginem Dei factus esset homo, quidam tamen paries, id est peccatum Ade, coniunctionem impediebat, et ipsos ab invicem distinguebat. Ipsi tamen sibi, per prophetas sepissime colloquentes, dixerunt per beatam incarnacionem insimul convenire et sub moro arbore, id est sub cruce, ad fontem baptismi et gratie invicem consentire. Sic ergo factum est quod illa puella, anima, propter leenam, dyabolum, ad fontem gratie ire non potuit, sed adventum amici sui, Dei filii, sub silentio expectavit. Aggei 2: *Si moram fecerit expecta eum quia venit et non tardabit* [Habakkuk 2,3]. Ista igitur iuxta cumdictum venit finaliter et sub arbore crucis amore Tyspe, id est anime, se morti exposuit. Ita quod arborem ipsam crucis proprio sanguine cruentavit et colore ipsius denigravit. Anima ergo fidelis instar Tyspe debet per compassionem eodem passionis gladio se transfigere et iuxta sponsum inseparabiliter permanere.[55]

### 2. Johann Meder

Filius: «O amantissime Iesu, tibi inexhaustas refero gratiarum actiones, et rogo ut me (quomodo id possim peragere) informatum me velis».
Iesus eum ducit ad parabolam, cui semper consuetum fuit ad turbam loqui in parabolis ut dicit Mat. XIII [Matthew 13,34], dicens: «Vide». Et vidit huiuscemodi parabolam.
«Vidi - inquit - civitatem magnam valde, in qua due domus sibi coniuncte site erant. In una morabatur rex inclitus habens unicum filium sibi in omnibus equalem. In alia morabatur quidam turpis princeps sub ipso habens quasi captam puellam, que corpore quidem formosa erat, sed vestibus ipsa plebeia. Attamen filius regis multum diligebat eam cupiens ei matrimonialiter copulari. Erant autem bene utrique custoditi, nec poterant in invicem convenire, sed solum hoc habebant quod per fissuram parietis colloqui obscure valebant. Factum autem est post multum tempus pacti sunt mutuo quatenus, relictis paternis domibus, circa fontem quendam sub quadam moro situm convenirent, ut mutuam dilectionem perfectius ac iocundius sibi invicem ostenderent. Et ecce, die statuto puella prevenit iuvenem, properans quamtotius ad fontem. Cui appropinquanti leo occurrit caloribus estuans intensissimis ac sitibundus. Quo viso aufugit e fonte puella, relictis ibidem cum pepulo [sic!] vestibus quibus induta erat albis. Sed cum sitibundus leo os posuisset in aquam, cruor haut modicus de ore eius exiens pepulum [sic!] cum vestibus cruore suo labefactavit. Quid plura?

[55] Johann [Conrad] Gritsch, *Quadragesimale* [Nuremberg, not after 1474], 32R.

Venit interim (iam de loco recedente leone) iuvenis et vidit puelle vestes cruore bestiali maculatas et, ex hoc ipsam suspicans ob sui occasionem morte tam turpi interisse, se pre nimio amore et compassione in arborem suspendens, proprio gladio cor proprium penetravit, seipsum morti ob puelle amorem ultro exponens. Quo facto revertitur puella, relicto leonis timore, ad priorem locum, et vidit que circa iuvenem contingerunt, ac per hoc coniciens ob ipsius amorem hec facta, gladium de corde iuvenis eximens proprium cor suum pre nimia compassione et amore cum eodem gladio penetravit. Hanc vidi parabolam. O amantissime Iesu, dic cuius sit interpretationis».
Iesus: «Hec civitas est totum universum, domus regis celum, filius regis ego sum, domus turpis mundus est, dyabolus princeps, qui puellam, id est humanam animam, captivam tenebat, quam et ego dilexi, cupiens per humanam naturam mihi eam copulari, quod fieri non poterat multo tempore quousque plenitudo ipsius veniret. Sed per fissuram, id est prophetias, obscure sibi loquebar promittens meum adventum. Sed, veniente tempore, veni et ego ad aquam ut ei virtutem regenerandi tribuerem. Sed ante hec vidi puellam a leone dyabolo laceratam et maculatam. Cui pre nimio amore, quo eam diligebam, meipsum voluntarie cruci exponens, dirissimam mortem (ad quam non obligabar) libenter sustinui, videns quia propter me hanc suam miseriam sustineret eo quod primus homo voluit rapere in paradiso quod meum erat, id est scientiam Dei patris. Hunc igitur amorem meum cum anima devota mente conceperit, debet et ipsa in meo amore inardescere, et propter me omnia mala libenter sustinere, etiam mortem. Et talis anima est que se reddit dignam communicando meis passionibus. Tu ergo fac similiter et mente tua concipe que propter te sustinui».[56]

**3. Jacobus de Lenda**

Quarta causa est formalis. Unde legitur in tertio [sic !] libro methamorphoseos quod erat quidam rex qui habebat unum filium et ille rex habebat unum magnum castrum, domus autem cuiusdam pauperis erat sibi contigua. Ille pauper habebat unam pulcherrimam filiam. Filius autem illius regis sepe intuebatur eam de fenestra sua et erat filio valde grata et dicit semel quod si pater suus vellet quod eam duxeret in uxorem, ipse esset contentus eam duxere in uxorem. Ipse vero descendit de castro et salutavit eam et dicit ei: «Veni ad me».
«O – dicit filia – non auderem ire, domine!».
Dicit ei filius: «Ne dubites quia nolo tibi facere quicquid quid sit in dedecus tuum nec meum».
Tunc dicit filia: «Domine mi, ancilla vestra sum et ero, si vobis placuerit, toto tempore vite mee».
Filius regis videns humilitatem huius puelle incitatus est amore eius et dicit ei: «Vade ad talem fontem et ibi loquemur adinvicem».

[56] [Johann Meder], *Quadragesimale novum* (Basel: Michael Furter, 1495), fol. r2rv.

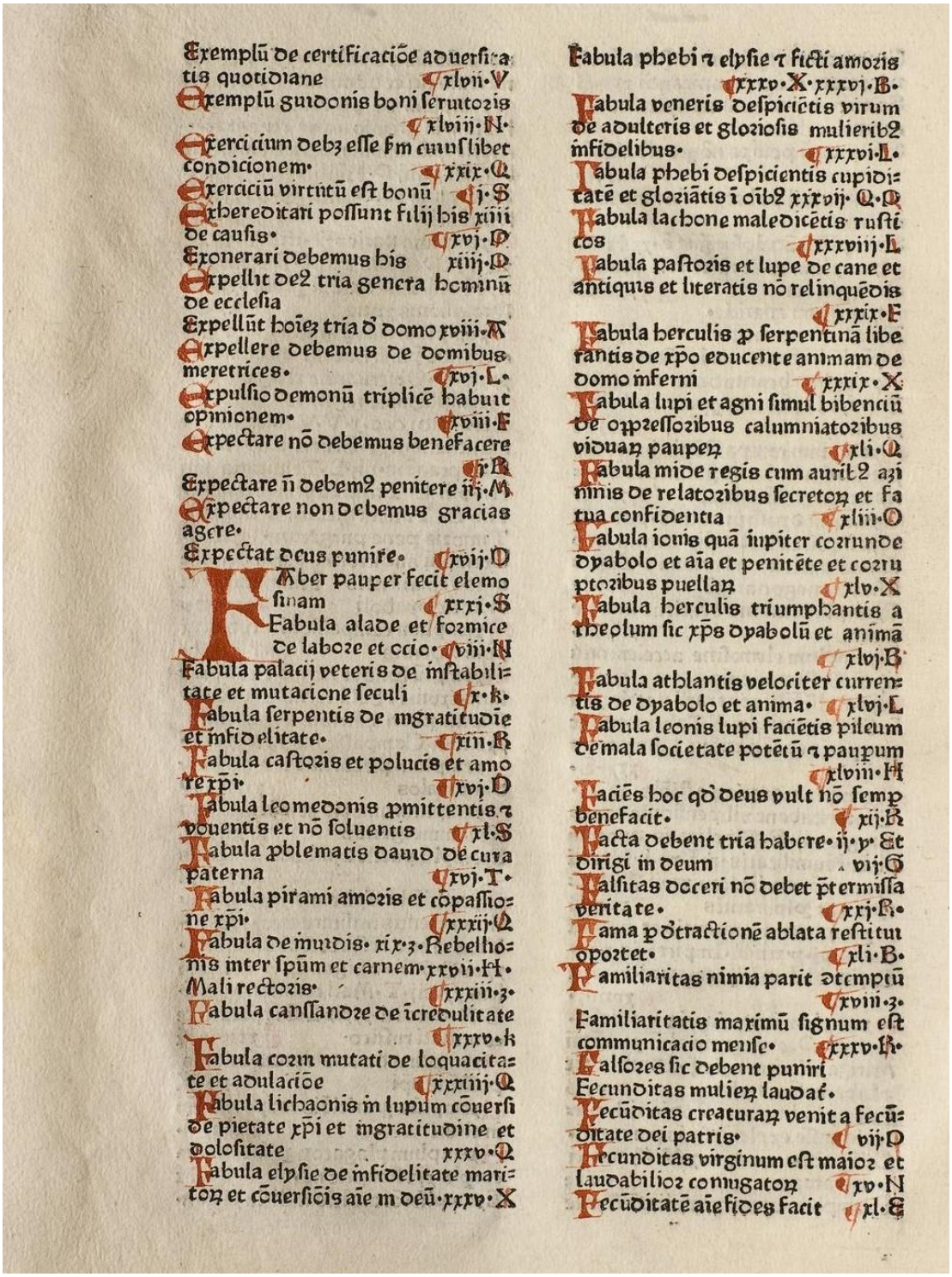
Ipsa vero accepit potum suum cum capitergio suo et ivit ad fontem et cum fuit iuxta fontem vidit teterrimum leonem et relicto poto fugit et reliquit capitergium. Et veniens filius regis ad fontem, reperit capitergium et potum, credidit quod leo devorasset eam et cum spada sua seipsum interfecit. Filia autem surrexit de loco in quo erat absconsa propter leonem et veniens ad fontem reperit filium regis mortuum et pre nimio dolore amici sui cepit eandem spadam et transfodit per medium cordis sui et mortua est.

Istud figurat misterium passionis domini Iesu Cristi ubi duo mortui sunt, scilicet Cristus et virgo Maria. O qualis dolor! O qualis tristicia, *ipsius animam pertransivit gladius* [Luke 2,35]. Sed video nunc totam curiam celestem desolatam, ideo ad illam non oportet accedere, nec ad deum patrem propter mortem filii sui, nec ad Mariam sicut consuetum est propter eius desolationem. Ideo, ad illam que hodie suscepit Cristum redemptorem convertemus nos eanque devote salutabimus salutatione qua salutatur ab ecclesia dicentes: *O crux, ave, spes unica etc*.[57]

[57] Jacobus de Lenda, *Sermones quadragesimales* (Paris: Félix Baligault, 1499/1500), fol. 64rv.

**Images**

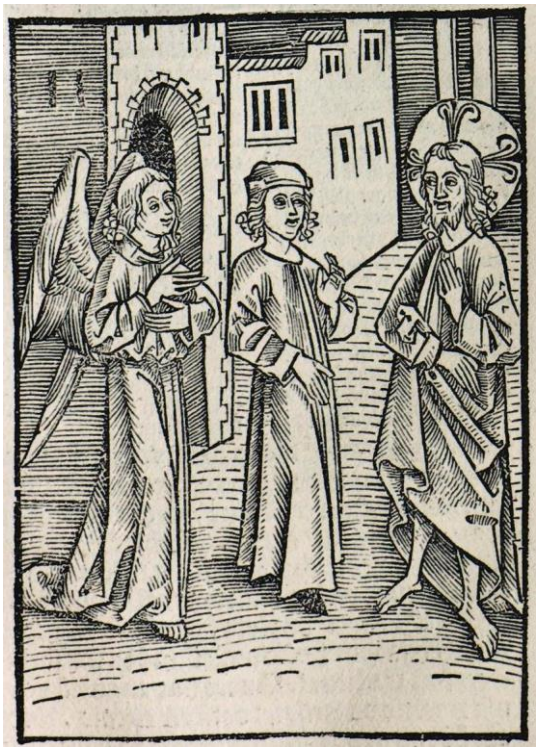
1.

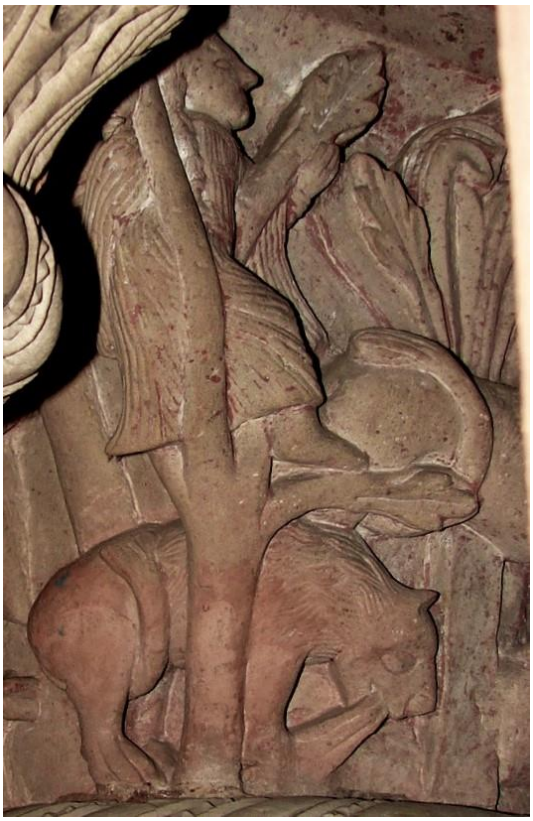


Exemplū de certificaciōe aduersita tis quotidiane xlvii·V
Exemplū guidonis boni seruitoris xlviij·N·
Exercicium debz esse ſm cuuſlibet condicionem· xxix·Q
Exerciciū virtutū est bonū j·S
Exhereditari possunt filij his xiiii de causis· xvj·P
Exonerari debemus bis xiiij·D
Expellit de2 tria genera hominū de ecclesia
Expellūt hoiez tria ō domo xviii·A
Expellere debemus de domibus meretrices· xvj·L·
Expulsio demonū triplicē habuit opinionem· xviii·F
Expectare nō debemus benefacere j·B
Expectare ñ debem2 penitere iij·M
Expectare non debemus gracias agere·
Expectat deus punire· xvij·D
Faber pauper fecit elemosinam xxxj·S
Fabula alade et formice de labore et ocio· viii·N
Fabula palacij veteris de instabilitate et mutacione seculi x·k·
Fabula serpentis de ingratitudie et infidelitate· xiii·R
Fabula castoris et polucis et amore xpi· xvj·D
Fabula leomedonis promittentis et vouentis et nō soluentis xl·S
Fabula problematis dauid de cura paterna xvj·T·
Fabula pirami amoris et cōpassione xpi· xxxij·Q
Fabula de inuidis· xix·z·Rebellionis inter spūm et carnem·xxvii·H·
Mali rectoris· xxxiii·z·
Fabula canssandre de incredulitate xxxv·k
Fabula corui mutati de loquacitate et adulacioe xxxiiij·Q
Fabula lichaonis in lupum cōuersi de pietate xpi et ingratitudine et dolositate xxxv·Q
Fabula elysie de infidelitate maritoꝝ et cōuersicis aie in deū·xxxv·X
Fabula phebi et elysie et ficti amoris xxxv·X·xxxvj·B·
Fabula veneris despicictis virum de adulteris et glorioſis mulierib2 infidelibus· xxxvi·L·
Fabula phebi despicientis cupiditatē et gloriātis i oib2 xxxvij·Q·D
Fabula lachone maledicētis rusticos xxxviij·L
Fabula pastoris et lupe de cane et antiquis et literatis nō relinquēdis xxxix·F
Fabula herculis p serpentinā liberantis de xpo educente animam de domo inferni xxxix·X
Fabula lupi et agni simul bibenciū de oppressoribus calumniatoribus viduaꝝ pauperꝝ xli·Q
Fabula mide regis cum auric2 azininis de relatoribus secretoꝝ et fatua confidentia xliii·O
Fabula ionis quā iupiter coꝛrunde dyabolo et aīa et penitēte et coꝛruptoribus puellaꝝ xlv·X
Fabula herculis triumphantis a theolum sic xps dyabolū et animā xlvj·B
Fabula athlantis velociter currentis de dyabolo et anima· xlvj·L
Fabula leonis lupi faciētis pileum de mala societate potētū et paupum xlviii·H
Faciēs hoc qd deus vult nō semp benefacit· xij·R
Facta debent tria habere· ij·y· Et dirigi in deum vij·G
Falsitas doceri nō debet pt ermissa veritate· xxj·R·
Fama p detractionē ablata restitui oportet· xli·B·
Familiaritas nimia parit detemptū xviii·z·
Familiaritatis maximū signum est communicacio mense· xxxv·R·
Falsoꝛes sic debent puniri
Fecunditas mulieꝝ laudat·
Fecūditas creaturaꝝ venit a fecūditate dei patris· vij·D
Fecunditas virginum est maioꝛ et laudabilioꝛ coniugatoꝝ xv·N
Fecūditatē aie fides facit xl·E

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

8. 

**Captions**

1. Entry *fabula* in the index of Johann [Conrad] Gritsch, *Quadragesimale* [Reutlingen: Michael Greyff, not after 1479], unpagined. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt, Inc-v-106
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Meister des Haintz Narr, woodcuts, in Johann Meder, *Quadragesimale novum de filio prodigo* (Basel: Michael Furter, 1495), Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt, Inc-i-85,
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2. The prodigal son is in misery, and his guardian angel speaks to him (fol. c8r).
3. The father welcomes his returned son (fol. n4v).
4. The father provides his son with new clothes and hands him over to Christ (fol. q6r)

Cathedral of Basel, twelfth-century capital
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5. Thisbe hides from a lion, which shreds her veil
6. Pyramus fights the lion and recovers Thisbe's veil
7. Pyramus pierces himself while hanging on a tree and holding the veil; the desperation of Thisbe
8. Thisbe kills herself with Pyramus' sword